

WYCOMBE WANDERERS 0, CARSHALTON ATHLETIC 2

AT LAST! After failing to pick up a victory in their first 13 Berger Isthmian League games of the season, struggling Carshalton turned the corner at the 14th attempt with a gritty performance at Loakes Park on Saturday.

Faced by a sadly disappointing Wycombe side who are grossly flattered by their lofty position in the Premier Division table, Carshalton did not set out to win either friends in the Wycombe crowd or awards for soccer elegance.

"We've played good football at times this season and come away with nothing," said manager Phil Amato afterwards. "We weren't interested in any of that today — we thought it would be a battle, and we were right, but we got down and did what was necessary to get a result."

"Technically, we were rubbish today, but the lads know that, and so do I. It's important that we keep things in proportion."

"The only really important thing to come out of today was the fact that they were prepared to get stuck in and battle for 90 minutes. It's a step in the right direction — but we've still got a long way to go yet."

Amato was right to strike the note of caution, because praiseworthy as Robins' display was in its own way, it did get an awful lot of help from Wycombe's ineptitude along the way.

But things, in spite of that title-chasing position, are not right at Loakes Park, and if this

By MEL WEBB

performance is anything to go by, they will be very lucky to stay up there.

They lacked mobility, they lacked ideas, they lacked commitment — and they almost totally lacked anything resembling a plan in the middle of the field.

It was there that the game was really won and lost. Carshalton, full of heart and energy, held all the high cards in the midfield area, where the darting Robin Kember was well supported by the combative Dave Burke and the elegant Graham Dennis.

There were fine performances, too, from Tony Coombe, at last playing in his rightful position in the back four and the experienced Richard Reynolds, so adept at shielding the ball and giving things a chance to develop around him.

Carshalton looked the better side from the early stages, but the suspicion was there at that time that Wycombe were merely warming up for something special.

But time went on, Carshalton got stronger, and the home side showed no signs of letting the

thoke in. And by midway through the first half Carshalton were dictating the pattern of play while Wycombe chased — not always very enthusiastically, it must be said.

Dennis had already seen a shrewd chip sail inches over with Wycombe keeper Spittle off his line and Alan Walker had gone close with a couple of good efforts when, in the 27th minute, Carshalton took a deserved lead.

The architect of the goal was the languid Dennis, who swung over a beautifully flighted free kick and Gaydon, a constant threat to the Wycombe defence in set-piece situations, rose high to head through Spittle's hands.

Seven minutes before half-time Gaydon was booked for a foul on Atkins, a fate that was to befall both Tony Maurice and Coombe for dis-sent in the second half.

But the bookings were more the result of total commitment from the Carshalton side than any evil intent.

Wycombe looked slightly more impressive in the second half, and in the 69th minute forced an incredible goal-line clearance by Steve Bangs, who hooked a Steve Long effort out from under the bar as the ball bounced towards the net.

Wycombe boss Andy Williams took a calculated gamble with 15 minutes to go and replaced defender Garry Fowles with striker Dylan Evans, but with Phil Dade having replaced the injured Gary Allen midway through the half, Carshalton were content to string a fifth man along the back and snuff out anything that Wycombe could throw at them.

And in the end it was a manoeuvre that was to rebound on Wycombe with a vengeance.

With seven minutes left, Maurice made a long, swift run, caught the three-man Wycombe defence hopelessly stretched with a long pass to Reynolds, and all it took was a low pass into the middle for Walker to sweep the ball first time past the hopelessly exposed Spittle.

Wycombe. — Spittle, Hardwick, Davies, Fowles, Phillips, Priestley, Atkins, Holifield, Long, Kennedy, Scott. Sub: Evans for Fowles.

Carshalton. — Finch, Maurice, Bangs, Coombe, Gaydon, Kember, Burke, Dennis, Reynolds, Walker, Allen. Sub: Dade for Allen.